

Friends' Meeting House at Jerusalem
Wantagh, Nassau County, New York

HABS No. 4-405

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[MEASURED DRAWINGS AND DATA PAGES ONLY]

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District No.4

Historic American Buildings Survey
Wm. Dewey Foster, District Officer
25 West 45th Street, New York City

FRIENDS' MEETING HOUSE AT JERUSALEM
Wantagh, Nassau County, New York

Owner: Society of Friends

Date of Erection: 1827

Present Condition: It is in a fine state of preservation, sound and well cared for, but with the possibility of destruction facing it through sheer want of membership. It has been included in this survey for that reason and that it is typical of the rest of these buildings in size, shape and in character.

Number of Stories: One and one-half.

Materials of Construction: The building is framed of oak. The timbers are morticed, tenoned and pinned together without the use of nails. The outside is covered with shingles and the inside, above a wood wainscot is plastered up to and including a ceiling across at the eaves level.

The foundations are of rubble stone, but the space below the floor is without opening, despite the need of the wood beams for ventilation.

Formerly two brick chimneys ran up from the attic floor, probably connected to stoves below by metal pipes. These masonry units standing on the wood construction have been removed, except for the lower courses showing their former location and use.

Other Existing Records: Written Records: Thompson, "History of Long Island", 1843.

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The Quakers on Long Island

From the days of the very early settlers on Long Island, the Quakers played an important part in the development and character of the life of the community. They came to New Amsterdam and from there, thru Brooklyn, Jamaica and Flushing, they went out into what is now Nassau County.

Early in the second half of the 17th century these "peculiar" people were persecuted for their beliefs, but, as usual, religious enthusiasm burned brighter rather than be stifled by this aggression, so that Kieth, writing of the community of Oyster Bay about 1701, described it as being nine-tenths Quakers.

Such names as Jerusalem, Jericho, Babylon and Bathpage are preserved to us in town or highway as a heritage of the Friends.

In the year 1644 there was a large exodus from Stamford, Connecticut to Long Island. Capt. John Saaman and Robert Jackson, of this group, purchased from the Indians a tract of 1500 acres along the Jerusalem River. Their houses and those of their many children soon formed the nucleus for the village of Jerusalem.

At an early time certain of these Seamen adopted the tenets of the Society of Friends and are reported to have held meetings in their houses from 1697 to 1793. (History of Long Island, 1902, Peter Ross.)

There was an early meeting house built in 1689, and rebuilt during or just after the Revolution according to Thompson, but unconfirmed elsewhere. (History of Long Island, 1843, Benj. F. Thompson.)

A very close relation always existed between the Friends of Jerusalem and of Jericho, especially during the life-time of Elias Hicks, leader of the latter group, who preached many times at Jerusalem.

Elias Hicks, a man of enormous energies, after some 10,000 miles of travel and preaching thru the Northeastern colonies and Canada, took up his residence in Jericho about 1771, continuing his ardent labors until his death in 1830.

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The Jericho meeting authorized the building of a new (?) meeting house at Jerusalem in 1827. The ground was part of the farm of Ardon Seaman, and this individual labored and preached here until his death in 1875.

Since that time, the group of Friends has died off or sold out and moved away from Jerusalem, until there is no Quaker community left. In 1929 the regular weekly meetings were merged with the Jericho Friends, and now, only the annual business meeting is held in the Jerusalem Meeting House.

The Building

The Friends Meeting House at Jerusalem stands well back in its property to the east of Wantagh Avenue, formerly Jerusalem Road. Beyond it lies the burying ground, which continues to receive its toll, even though the Meeting House is now almost never used.

The site is a little north of Jerusalem Avenue, the old highway to Hempstead, and is now included in the Village of Wantagh.

The building consists of one large room, entered, as is usual in Nassau County, from the south, with the long "elders seats" across the north.

Midway, east and west, the room is divided by a series of vertical sliding panels, for the purpose of forming separate rooms for men and women in their business meetings.

Everything is detailed with the utmost simplicity and even the dull drab gray paint is of the most sobre character.

The attic space above the ceiling beams is reached thru a queer high door which is set about 7'6" off the ground and is approachable by ladder only. From this door stairs lead up to what was the wood storage space.

The Jerusalem Meeting House is one of the simpler type, having no gallery like the Jericho and other more elaborate buildings of the sect.

Lester G. Chapin,
July 26, 1934.

Edited at HABS National Headquarters
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Reviewed 1936, H.C.F.